

LESSON 4

REGARD

In this lesson, the community of Christ's redeemed, the local church, is called to live their reconciled lives together in Christlike regard for one another. As the model of a new humanity the church is to think, value, and esteem one another Christianly, not naturally. Here we have the bearing of creed upon conduct. In the light of the gospel, we are called to regard and take interest in one another over self for Christ's glory and our joy.

#10

HONOR ONE ANOTHER

Love one another with brotherly affection.

Outdo one another in showing honor.

— Romans 12:10 —

Keyword: *proēgeomai*

to go before or first, lead the way, outdo

timē

worth, value, esteem, honor; paid in token of worth or value

Context: The gospel redeems the unworthy and transforms them. All who are truly in Christ offer themselves as a living sacrifice. They live in the mercy of God through Christ, which is manifest in a deep humility of mind. In humility, they love like Christ loves. And the manner of their love eagerly honors the one loved.

Honoring God is linked to honoring all that is His. The church is His. If we are to honor Christ, we are to honor all in His church.

Honor has to do with expressing value and worth. It is to give weight to the worth of another.

This command is concerned with the outworking and quality of love within the household of God. Christians owe a mutual love to one another. If love is to be our hallmark (John 13:35), unfeigned and without prejudice, then it will be preceded by *humility* and expressed in *honor*. Whatever our expression of love to one another may be, if it is true, it will be clothed in a humility that seeks the truest honor of the other.

The currency of brotherly love is honor. In fact, the word used for “honor” is sometimes employed to describe a price paid or received (cf. Acts 4:34; 5:2; 7:16; etc.). It is the basis of our word “honorarium”—payment made out of respect for a service given. From this monetary connotation, we get the meaning of valuing or esteeming.

Our love within the church is to deliberately show forth one another’s value; it is to publish statements of one another’s worth in both word and deed. We are to respect one another with a peculiarity unexplainable by human convention. This is no backscratcher mentality—“I’ll scratch your back if you scratch mine.” There is no self-seeking in this duty. No secret agenda. It is selfless and otherward. It is not natural but rather gospel borne. In this way, the honor that is here called for is to be understood “as an advantage to be given by believers one to another instead of claiming it for self.”¹

I admire the efforts of the English Standard Version translators to capture the force of our text in its original language. The word rendered “outdo” suggests the idea of “surpassing one another in showing honor.”² It is most often used to mean “lead the way,” “be the first,” etc. Literally it means “to go before” in consideration or regard. Here it conveys the idea of being the first to honor others; to go before others in showing honor rather than waiting to be honored yourself. We should be glad to prove the sincerity of our love to one another.

AGAINST PRIDE

Obedience to this Christian duty demands deliberate humility. The chapter opens with a picture of death to self (“living sacrifice”) as worship to God, and then quickly stresses the importance of a living humility towards one another in God’s family: “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone

¹ Vine, 310.

² Moo, 777.

among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned" (Romans 12:3). The progression is clear: death to self (12:1), humility (12:3), love (12:9), and then honor (12:10). Humility is the soil from which the flower of love springs, and the ground from which showing honor to one another thrives. Clearly, then, the concept of "outdoing" one another is a bit ironic. To outdo one another is naturally the interest of a self-seeking soul, yet here the whole objective is the honor, respect, value, and esteem of the other rather than self. Such must mark the outworking and quality of our love for one another.

While ours is not the kind of honor society that characterized the original recipients of the New Testament, there are certain traits that never change. Today our language is esteem—predominantly "self-esteem." But such is exactly opposite of this Christian duty. Thomas Manton has well said:

There is a pride which consists in overvaluing ourselves, and showeth itself either in the mind and conceit or desires. In the mind and conceit, when we set an high price upon ourselves, and represent ourselves to ourselves in a feigned likeness ... Alas! we that are so well acquainted with ourselves and our own weakness should be inclined to prefer others in honour before ourselves. We know more by ourselves than we can by others. Let us not look upon ourselves in the glass of self-love, for there is nothing more fallacious than that glass: Prov. 16:2, 'All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirit;' if God put us into the balance. But when we look upon ourselves in the glass of self-conceit, everything seemeth double to what it is, and we think ourselves much wiser and better than we are.³

Matthew Henry expands on this idea:

Instead of contending for superiority, let us be forward to give to others the pre-eminence. This is explained, Phil. 2:3, *Let each esteem other better than themselves*. And there is this good reason for it, because, if we know our own hearts, we know more evil by ourselves than we do by any one else in the world. We should be forward to take notice of the gifts, and graces, and performances of our brethren, and value them accordingly, be more forward to praise another, and more pleased to hear another praised, than ourselves.⁴

The beauty of this command is that it is given not to the recipient but to the giver of honor. It promotes humility and affords no room for self-seeking. In John 5:44 we read, "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the

³ Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, vol. 21 (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1874), 414.

⁴ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2228.

only God?" Here we are reminded that seeking glory from one another is contrary to Christ and the gospel. Such is not love at all and should have no place in the church of God.

AGAINST ENVY

If we were to truly obey this one command, there would be no envy in the church. Let us remember that "love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant" (1 Corinthians 13:4).

A God-centered community has no idols. None but God should be worshipped and glorified in the church. Self is not supreme, nor is the community supreme; Christ alone is supreme. But far from diminishing love among its members, the preeminence of Christ establishes it with a depth and substance found only in the gospel. The gospel itself puts forth the glory of God as the primary purpose in Christ's sufferings (John 13:31-32), yet such does not diminish in the least the breathtaking love of God toward unworthy sinners and their celebration of that love (John 3:16).

Richard Baxter explains this other-interested love with these words:

God must be first and principally loved, as the chief and infinite Good: he must be loved for himself, as being goodness itself, and most amiable in himself, and that unlimitedly with all the soul. The creature must be loved only for God, as bearing his image, or the marks of his perfection, and as a means to know, and please, and glorify him. Those must be most loved who have most of the image of God, in wisdom, righteousness, and holiness. The godly must be loved as godly, with a special love. Professed Christians must be beloved as such.⁵

Christian love must be a real love; not a show of mere words. For it to make much of Christ, the love demonstrated within the local church must manifest something of the gospel. Verbal compliments, flattery, and adulation may make up a form of love in the world, but such is not the love of Christians. There is no resemblance to the gospel in the use of mere words and flattery.

Love, which is the cement of human society; for where love reigneth, there will be mutual service and submission: Gal. 5:13, 'But by love serve one another;' Rom. 12:10, 'Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love.' Christians should be made up of perfect kindness. Where there is love in superiors and inferiors, they will respect each other's good and profit; and so all Christians, none excepted, will be servants one to another; as being members of the same body, they ought not to live to themselves only, but promote the good of the body, and every member thereof: 1 Cor. 12:27, 'Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.' In their place

⁵ Richard Baxter and William Orme, *The Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter*, vol. 19 (London: James Duncan, 1830), 347-348.

and calling every one will do his part, and therefore love sweeteneth all things, and will make us stoop, though to serve the meanest person in the world.⁶

Beloved, let us outdo one another in showing honor to one another, to make much of Christ in His church.

AGAINST PREJUDICE

Brotherly affection is pictured as a kind of knitting together of souls, where individuals cultivate a communion of interests and though equals esteem the other as more important than self. Turn the first of "me" upside down and you have "we."

Equals, in giving honour, must go on before another (Romans 12:10). The Apostle saith not, *in taking honour*, because the duty by him prescribed, concerns not all persons, but those alone who are of a like or equal condition.⁷

We are better acquainted with ourselves than others; we want some perfection and accomplishment God hath given to them. We ought to speak of our own gifts with modesty, of theirs with charity⁸

QUESTIONS

Do you enjoy talking more about yourself or another?

Do you generally dominate your conversations? Does the subject of discussion keep coming back to you?

⁶ Manton, 19:432.

⁷ William Perkins, *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience (English Experience Series No 482)* (Walter J Johnson, 1972).

⁸ Manton, 19:431.

How do the following verses fit with this responsibility?

- "Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips" (Proverbs 27:2).
- "Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her" (Proverbs 31:28).
- "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised" (Proverbs 31:30).
- "Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates" (Proverbs 31:31).

Consider 1 Peter 2:17, "Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor." If we are commanded to show honor to everyone, then how much more to those who are God's, who He has placed in our lives?

#11

REGARD ONE ANOTHER AS MORE IMPORTANT THAN SELF

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit,
but in humility **count others more significant than yourselves.**

— Philippians 2:3 —

Keyword: *hēgeomai*

to consider, think, regard, esteem, deem to be; to lead, guide, conduct

Context: This responsibility is situated in the example of Christ's immeasurable humility. It is attached to the sameness of mind and love that Christ Himself demonstrated toward us in the gospel. This quality of mind should mark the church.

In our last one another, we were commanded to "outdo one another in showing honor" (Romans 12:10). Here we are called to deny our own honor. To genuinely show forth the value of one another is virtuous and pleasing to God. To advertise your own honor, place yourself first, blow your own horn, solicit attention, publish statements of self-worth, and seek glory from men is corrupt and displeasing to God.

In order to rightly put this responsibility into practice, several features of it must be observed.

THE SETTING

Few statements are more directly critical of the spirit of self-interest because few statements are more permeated with Christ and Him crucified. The context of this verse is gospel saturated, furnishing the truest substance of its intent.

As we ought to relate to one another in the church, we are called collectively to "let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ" (1:27). Together, we are to be "standing firm in one spirit," maintaining "one mind" as we are "striving side by side," and all this "for the faith of the gospel" (1:27). Truly living for Christ may involve serious suffering, and this must be seen not as contrary to

the purposes of Christ in the Christian life, but actually a grace gift “granted” (from : “give freely or graciously, grant as a favor”) for His sake (1:29).

But suffering is not the only experience to be expected in walking the Christian life together. Encouragement, comfort, love, affection, sympathy, and joy are all put forward as desirable and attainable experiences, even in the midst of suffering.

Realization of this responsibility in the church is impossible apart from the gospel. We must always remember the setting when we consider the charge. It is preceded and followed by some of the profoundest statements and illustrations of the gospel found in the New Testament.

THE PROHIBITION

Next, we must remember that this responsibility begins with a prohibition. The command to “count others as more significant than yourselves” is impossible without first denying yourself in obedience to the prohibition: “do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit.” Before we can “put on” humility, we must “put off” pride.

THE PROBLEM

We must deny *our own honor*. There is no sin more common to man and more deeply rooted in the heart than a desire to be honored. Even if one has the most despicable disposition and even if his conduct is abominable, he nevertheless wishes to be honored and somewhat esteemed. In all that he does he has his honor in view, wanting others to acknowledge and treat him according to what he imagines himself to be and considers himself worthy of. He who fails to do so, or does something which appears to dishonor him, must expect his wrath. Such an objective and such a desire we must purge ourselves of.⁹

“Selfish ambition” sits at the very heart of human depravity. This problem is seen in several places (see Romans 2:6-8; 2 Corinthians 12:20; Galatians 5:20, 26; Philippians 1:17; James 3:14-17). There is nothing more in accord with corrupt humanity than to love self at the expense of others, and nothing more in the likeness of Christ than to deny yourself for the glory of God in the service of love to others. Therefore, this form of love is very near the heart of the Christian ethic. The closer we approach this stunning crux of Christ the more distant we see our profession and practice.

He who is most at peace with his own corruptions is most conflicted with others; he who is most conflicted with his own corruptions is most at peace with others.

⁹ Wilhelmus A Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service* (Reformation Heritage Books, 2012).

These words simply demand the most difficult of deaths to self. We are quite literally commanded to climb down from our personal thrones in order to see and love one another rightly.

Self is not to be foremost; selfishness is not to be the motive. Probably there is no command of the Bible which would have a wider sweep than this, or would touch on more points of human conduct, if fairly applied. Who is there who passes a single day without, in some respect, desiring to display himself? What minister of the gospel preaches, who never has any wish to exhibit his talents, eloquence, or learning? How few make a gesture, but with some wish to display the grace or power with which it is done! Who, in conversation, is always free from a desire to show his wit, or his power in argumentation, or his skill in repartee? Who plays at the piano without the desire of commendation? Who thunders in the senate, or goes to the field of battle; who builds a house, or purchases an article of apparel; who writes a book, or performs a deed of benevolence, altogether uninfluenced by this desire? If all could be taken out of human conduct which is performed merely from 'strife,' or from 'vain-glory,' how small a portion would be left!¹⁰

THE VIRTUE

The key to this responsibility is summed up as living, thinking, and loving “in humility.” It is a quality of mind. To be “in” humility is to place oneself under the influence of Christ’s humility. John Eadie rightly comments, “Humility dispels the self-importance which is continually taking and asserting the measure of its own claims, when it comes into contact with others.”¹¹ He also notes that “Humility is not undue self-depreciation.”¹² Humility does not call us to demean or neglect ourselves. It does not call us to look at ourselves with hate but rather to look away from ourselves with love.

THE DUTY

Our duty is in our discerning. The exercise of this virtue is in our valuing. The essential character of humility is to think a certain way—to think in a manner that makes much of Christ.

The verb used here “means consciously to focus on something or someone, to give it due consideration.”¹³ We are called to regard one another as “more significant” than ourselves. This is the “actual” of the responsibility, not a pretended or untrue estimation.

¹⁰ Barnes, 166.

¹¹ Eadie, 91–92.

¹² Eadie, 92.

¹³ Fee, 189.

Most men are too great and too good in their own esteem. Self-love representeth ourselves to ourselves in a feigned shape and likeness, much more wise, and holy, and just, than we are; it maketh us loathe other men's sins rather than our own, to extenuate other men's gifts and graces and cry up our own; but this should not be: Phil. 2:3 'Let each esteem another better than themselves.' Humility is content to sit in the meanest place: Eph. 3:8, 'Who am the least of all the saints;' 1 Tim. 1:15, 'Christ came to save sinners, of whom I am chief.' We know our own weakness better than others, and they may have secret excellences which we see not.¹⁴

In every detail of the revelation of God in the Son's coming there exists an unmistakable and grand antithesis to selfish ambition. The cross is a divine parody against human pride. These two principals are at odds: self and Christ. Either one is preeminent and the other denied supremacy or vice-versa. We either deny self or Christ when the impulse of self tempts us. We should be willing to suffer self-denial for the sake of Christ.

Love will dispose to walk humbly among men. For real and dear love will dispose men to high thoughts of them; and Christian love disposes men to think others better than themselves. Love will dispose men to honor one another. For we are naturally inclined to think honorably of those whom we love, and to give them honor. So that those precepts in 1 Peter 2:17 are fulfilled by love, "Honor all men." And Philippians 2:3, "In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." Love will dispose to contentment in the station in which God hath set him, without coveting anything which his neighbor possesses, or envying him any good thing which he has. Love will dispose men to meekness and gentleness in their carriage towards their neighbors, and not to treat them with passion or violence, but with moderation and calmness. Love checks and restrains a bitter spirit. For love has no bitterness in it. It is altogether a sweet disposition and affection of the soul. Love will prevent broils and quarrels, and will dispose to peaceableness. Love will dispose men to forgive injuries, which they receive from their neighbors. Proverbs 10:12, "Hatred stirreth up strifes; but love covereth all sins." Love will dispose men to all acts of mercy towards our neighbor who is under any affliction or calamity. For we are naturally disposed to pity those whom we love when they are afflicted. This would dispose men to give to the poor, and bear one another's burdens, to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice.¹⁵

Let us remember that this responsibility is chiefly exercised through the discipline of the mind.

Let the desire of our souls be to thy name: cause us to love thee, with all our hearts, to fear thee, trust in thee, and to delight in thee, and be satisfied in thee as our portion, and whatever we do to do it to thy glory. Keep us from inordinate self-love, from pride, and vainglory, and self-seeking, and from dishonouring thee, thy word, or service in the world.¹⁶

¹⁴ Manton, 326.

¹⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards (Yale University Press, 1989), 135–136.

¹⁶ Baxter, 518.

#12

STIR UP ONE ANOTHER TO LOVE AND GOOD DEEDS

And let us consider how to
stir up one another to love and good works,

— Hebrews 10:24 —

Keyword: *paroxusmos*

to incite, stir, stimulate, provoke, agitate, exasperate, irritate

Context: In light of the glorious gospel of grace through Christ and Him crucified, the church is called in Hebrews 10 to have a full assurance of faith. The effect of such faith works within the church to stimulate, even provoke, love and good works.

Here are prescribed ordinary means for extraordinary ends. You are chosen instruments, called to yield yourselves useful to God for the practical purpose of effecting eternal benefits for one another through temporary means.

Love to one another doesn't just happen automatically. Love both requires and serves one another. Love must be practical—manifestly evident in deeds.

QUESTIONS

Can you identify someone who may be slowly disengaging from fellowship? How might you stimulate them in love?

Do you resist such stimulation when others try? Or do you give thanks for it?

What is necessary to receive such stimulation?